

THE CHRISTIAN STUDENT:

An Address,

AT THE

OPENING OF THE SESSION (1856-57)

OF

MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE,

LONDON;

DELIVERED AT UNIVERSITY HALL, Oct. 7TH, 1856.

BY

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LONDON:

PRINTED BY CHARLES GREEN, HACKNEY.

1856.

AN ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,—In obedience to the wish of the College authorities, it devolves upon me to give you public greeting at the commencement of another session, and to say a few words respecting the duties in which it is about to engage us. If I rightly interpret the spirit of my task, these opening Addresses are designed at once to attune our own minds aright, by striking the true key-note of our studies here, and to invite and justify the sympathy of friends who for the moment may cease to be outside spectators of our work, and permit us to open what glimpses we can into the interior. To some of you this week begins an untried career; to all of us it offers a fresh stage: and while the space before us is yet clear and free, pledged to no folly and ready for all worth, it is the fitting hour for tracing the right path across it, and gathering up our forces to tread it firmly to the end. Not without reason have men in every age deemed it impious to float idly through the gates of new opportunity; have felt a sacredness to hang around the *beginnings* of things; and made a thoughtful pause upon the threshold of each enterprise, in order to possess themselves of its whole spirit ere they set a foot upon its ground. For it is in effect only the first steps in any trust that are truly ours. Faithfulness and wisdom exercised at that crisis have in them a self-continuing power: but the false path is often impossible to retrace; the over-vehement speed brings the penalty of exhaustion and the shame of violated resolve; the idle start entails the idler mood, and as the race is harder, the force grows less. It is well, then, for us who here engage in a common work, to re-seek its primary inspiration before we become again entangled in its details,—to catch once more “the great Taskmaster’s eye,” and read there the full meaning of the charge committed to us. And if in our meditations we can at all bring out into view the essential idea of your life

as Christian students, the whole organism of your appointed studies will receive its interpretation, and its several constituents answer for themselves to the criticisms of the external observer. I am far indeed from pretending, on behalf of the conductors and professors of this Institution, that its intellectual discipline is perfect in its shape and distribution, or invariably happy in its results. But I believe that in proportion as its critics, rising above the impatient tastes and partial standards of the hour, apprehend the permanent conditions of the Christian ministry in the world, they will find the more reason to respect its aims and plan, and (with us) to seek improvement mainly by bringing its realization nearer to its idea.

The single end for which this Institution exists, and by reference to which all its methods and spirit must be judged, is *the training of a body of men devoted to the advancement of the Christian life*. If the Christian life were not *our divine and authoritative ideal*, by which we are bound to try all human things,—or if its nature did not allow the service of any *class of special labourers*,—or if its standard of perfection were simply something *given and stationary*, to be held stiffly aloft, without any provision for movement with the moving host of men,—there would be no ground on which to rest the claims of this College. It springs from those who believe in a “Kingdom of Heaven” as the secret life and final issue of human probation,—who look upon the Church of Christ as its incipient embodiment and perpetual symbol,—who find in that Church functions of teaching and guidance which should be committed only to qualified and disciplined minds,—and who so trust the expansiveness of God’s spirit within this sacred Institute, that they will not bind themselves to any of its customary forms of dogma or of usage, but hold themselves not less free towards the types of the future than reverential towards those of the past. This last feature it is,—of an open theology,—by which we are here distinguished from other Christian schools,—a feature to which I trust we shall ever remain faithful,—without which we should represent a very limited history, instead of a very vast hope,—which, far from presenting a merely negative principle, is an expression of positive faith and confiding piety above the range of party and the atmosphere of doubt,—and which assuredly does but preserve the prospective attitude of mind induced by Divine Revelation, all the more thankful for the “elder prophets” that they set us

looking for ever fresh "consolations to Israel." In parting from the world, Christ "had yet many things to say" to his disciples, but "they could not bear them then." Some of them, no doubt, have found their utterance in the ages that have since elapsed; but if the "Comforter" that tells them to the heart "abides with us for ever," who shall forbid our prayer for deeper insight, or reproach us with scepticism in the present because our eye is yet open towards the future? When the founders of our institutions refuse to involve them in the contingencies of doctrinal definition, it is from no want of clear and fervent faith for their own life; it is because, in their view, God has more light than is needed for guiding *them*, and the Church of Christ is no completed thing, but a perpetual protest against evil never vanquished, and a pressure towards a Kingdom of Heaven never reached.

What, then, is that "Christian life" to the advancement of which we devote a spiritual order of men? Wherein does its essence consist, by which it is separated from other types of human thought and character, and shews us the falsehoods and dangers we are to withstand? If it is the life conformed to Christ's, what else can it be than the entire abnegation of self out of pure surrender to a God holy, affectionate and infinite? If there be any words that can express in brief the very kernel of the heart of Christendom, they are surely these,—"*the living sacrifice.*" This thought it is that makes the crucifix sublime,—that gives its calm and sad intensity to Christian Art,—that sings in the *Agnus Dei*,—and fills the interval between the heroic and the saintly mind. It is not, indeed, that sacrifice of selfish desires has ever been unknown among men, and can be claimed as a novelty in the ethics of the gospel. Our spiritual nature is and ever was a theatre of conflicting impulses, where, under even the darkest conditions, the higher has often prevailed. But the difference is this,—that the Pagan self-conquest has been a *self-assertion*; the Christian, a *self-surrender*. The one has presented itself as a preference of reason to passion, of honour to meanness, of generosity to unworthy ease; the other, as a relinquishment of personal will to diviner guidance, a free passing into the living hand of God. The one has recognized nothing but human morality in the august forms of the Good and Right; the other has seen veiled within them the Holiest of all. This conscious identification of God with whatever is felt to be claiming us, this overshadowing sense of His communion with us in

every higher trust and admiration, this investiture of the whole moral life with a sacramental value, is the distinctive characteristic of the Christian temper. The ideal it sets before us seeks its realization by other means than *self-culture*; rather by passing out of the personal centre, and permitting the will to drop away in faith and prayer. The peculiar humility and reverence which tinge the minds most deeply baptized in our religion, are but the natural light of this inner trust looking upward and shining through. To keep alive this Christ-like spirit, by becoming its organs and conveying it into the world of human affairs, is the proper function of the sacred ministry.

But how is it possible to *train* men for an office like this? How bring the preparation under rule and system? Is it not rather a thing of heavenly gift than of human acquisition? If the native inspiration be not there, is it not a vain attempt even to make the *poet*? and to make the *prophet* a vainer still? And if the living call *be* there, will it not make itself effectual without our aid? or, at least, without that elaborate and protracted culture on which we here insist?

Most assuredly there are higher conditions needed for this work than the wisest educators can command. If there be not some heavenly temper in the clay, rendering it mellower than the coarser stuff of our humanity, no hand of ours can mould it into vessels worthy of the temple, with the sacred emblems sharply cut. And our first duty unquestionably is, to select and destine to the service of our churches those only in whom there is some dawn of God's prophetic spirit, some clearness and depth of conscience, some tender lights of affection, some glow of young enthusiasm, giving fair promise of the coming day. Let it be freely admitted that the presence of a student, after reasonable probation, within this College, ought to afford a presumption of some peculiar gifts; not of that knowledge only which any one may acquire, or that moral faithfulness which can be dispensed with in none; but of lively sympathy, of ready self-forgetfulness, of quick recoil from evil, and heart open to reverence and devotion. It were greatly to be desired that the destination of young men to the ministry among us were determined much less than it is by external accidents and conditions, and more by intrinsic aptitudes, irrespective of condition. Could we but draw to this office all in whom the fitting graces lie ready though unconfessed, its whole aspect and character would rapidly change; the neutral

natures and inferior aptitudes would desert it of themselves; it would become a power of the first magnitude, and achieve again a work in society which there is still no other agency to perform. Shall it for ever remain the exclusive glory of Roman Catholicism, that she needs no secular bribes to bring to her altar the service of every outward and inward rank,—not of laborious mediocrity alone, but of capacity, of opulence, of genius?

When once the right selection of persons has been made, the problem is, “for the given aptitudes to find the fitting discipline.” A portion,—a most momentous portion,—of the student’s preparation here must consist in his simply following out the impulses that brought him hither,—in living out his self-dedication,—and giving perpetual and healthy exercise to the holy and human affections in which he has recognized the calling Word of God. It is a dangerous thing to let any noble inspiration pine and die for want of genial air and free movement in its proper field; and most imperfect and unnatural would be a training for the Christian Ministry, in which no room was left for the practical gymnastic of benevolence and piety. If the whole soul is not sustained in equal action,—if during the years when the intellectual character sets and ripens, the spiritual roots of the character feed only on the sap of *thought*, no vigorous and hardy growth will ever be possible. To the young, as to the mature, books and life are the correctives and interpreters of each other; and the receptive understanding needs the invigorating balance of the productive conscience. For my own part, I can never look with jealousy on the Sunday-school, the Domestic Mission, the village preaching, as injurious competitors for the attention of the student of divinity; but rather regard them as friendly allies, furnishing a needful supplement to the work of the class-room and the common hall. I have no fear that the young divine who seeks, in the humility of Christian service, some foretaste of his future experience, and tests his theological progress by intercourse with the poor, the suffering or the child, will relax the nerve of study and reduce his thirst for truth. On the contrary, he will lose the fatal lassitude of weak affections, and the caprices of a morbid will; and the busy brain will often find less refreshment from passive intermission than from acts of conscience that bring the peace of God. Hence the way should be left open, as indeed it is, for a due mingling of kindly self-sacrifice and deeper spiritual experience with the studious pursuits characteristic of this place. But, after

all, this higher discipline of character must ever remain an affair rather of private faithfulness than of public provision. And even without going out beyond the range of your immediate studies, you have a noble problem to attack. You have to see that the divine life within you is not overgrown and stifled by the intellectual; to keep the running waters pure and fresh under that rich growth. There is no necessary sanctity in the mere mental discipline of theology; and to expect any wiser or holier mood by simply stepping out of heathen into ecclesiastic literature, and transferring your critical eye from the page of Aristotle to that of St. Paul, would be a vain reliance. Throughout your course, the studies which engage you, be their subject sacred as it may, will stand related to you as *your secular business*; will bring the temptations inseparable from every human pursuit; and must be prevailed over and consecrated by a living spirit of earnest and aspiring devotion. Once depart from simple, truthful openness to heavenly things, and your knowledge will but terminate in that sad spectacle,—the *connoisseur in religion*, who knows all about it except itself; who has mastered every theory respecting God, but not yielded himself to the Infinite Reality.

So great is the persuasive power of intense conviction and personal devotion, that there are those who depreciate everything else, and who especially evince an impatience of the elaborate complexity and range of our educational training for the ministry. They look at the fewness and simplicity of the great Christian truths,—which may be taught to a child in the catechism, and have been condensed by the wise into compendious creeds; and they ask why these, after due comparison with Scripture, cannot be carried straight into life and applied to the duties and beliefs of men. Or they are struck, perhaps, by the contrast between the inartificial gifts of the earliest missionaries and the vast outfit of the modern divine; and fancy that by stripping off the intellectual incumbrance, we should get the apostles back again. But the scope of mental culture proper for the sacred office in one age, cannot be determined either by the wants of another, or by the absolute and permanent contents of Christian doctrine. A far other rule must be appealed to, which yields a very different reply. Be the life of a people or a period what it may, *its religion must be equal to the whole of it*, covering and pervading and penetrating every interest of action or of thought. There is nothing in which Christian Faith is to be denied its voice; and it goes

freely, as to its own, into every field that bears the footprints of humanity. It is vain for the secular and the spiritual powers of the world to negotiate a division of territory by which each shall bar out the other; no treaty, no award, can trace a boundary-line, any more than a mountain chain or trending coast can keep out the Almighty Maker of them both. The Kingdom of Heaven is in its very essence a universal theocracy; and God existing, nothing is at heart the same as if He existed not. It is a fatal thing to let any province of life constitute itself outside of the religious realm, and, under plea of being no insurgent land, excuse itself from consecration. So long as the national ideas were as simple and limited as those of the Hebrew race in the first century, so long the gospel needed more the intensity of God's spirit than its breadth; its possessor had an answer for every question, and neither slurred nor scorned any genuine want. But no sooner did it find itself in the midst of an Hellenic and a Roman civilization, than it had to deal with new problems, and penetrate to other seats of thought and consciousness in the human soul; and it expanded to the full capacity of those fresh demands, and obtained representatives who could use up the truth of Plato, and put a living fire into the ethics of Cicero. Well would it have been if no meaner interests had ever checked this adaptive genius in our religion, and made it seem unequal to the exigencies of advancing time. But there are two ways of seeking harmony between its spirit and the general course of the human mind, and preventing either overlapping the province of the other; by taking all new knowledge in, or by shutting all new knowledge out; by keeping open the capacity of faith, or keeping closed the limits of discovery. And for ages past the ancient Church of Christendom, having unhappily consecrated its cast-iron measure of doctrine, will not allow the universe to be bigger than that can reach: and hence, religion having become fixed, advancing culture becomes "profane;" and proceeds without a blessing, rather than not proceed at all. One after another, sciences have emerged and constituted themselves, tastes and habits have acquired social power, for which the Church, called universal, has no greeting or recognition,—which its philosophy pronounces to be nescience, and its casuistry condemns as godless. In the vain attempt to maintain against enlargement the narrow frontier of an earlier time, the empire of the human mind is gone; and the Church, false to the eternal essence which it held, drops behind

and becomes historical. Nor has Protestantism hitherto been much wiser; it has let the problem slip in another way. The old Christianity grasps at universality by holding its ancient confines, and resolutely denying that what lies beyond is really in the universe at all. The reformed Christianity surrenders the pretension to universality, releases the revolted provinces of knowledge from their allegiance, and proclaims them free; hoping by this prudent concession to retain the parent land unaffected by the giant growths it has disengaged. In virtue of this treaty of peace, intellectual research in every direction asserts its right to be purely secular, and to proceed as if it stood in no relation at all to faith; it studiously weeds out of its language and modes of thought every vestige of a religious idea, and assumes that reason might live upon the very same terms in a divine or an atheistic universe. Ingenuity is exhausted to invent for every truth neutral and abstract expressions which may serve equally in either way; and a sublime affectation of indifference becomes part of the established etiquette of scientific diplomacy. The understanding seems to be, "If you will not meddle with our geology (for instance), we will behave politely to your divinity." And yet the radical insincerity of this mutual neutrality is evident through so thin a veil. It is not true that the two lines of thought are separately pursued; on the contrary, the traveller on each feels an intense interest—be it of sympathy or of antipathy—in the procedure on the other; and often derives his chief impulse from the secret bearing of his doctrine on beliefs to which he never refers. Bold and logical minds are thus frequently brought into *conscious* self-variance, having their esoteric and their exoteric professions. Less complete and compact thinkers often remain at the stage of *unconscious* self-variance, and honestly but uneasily believe each doctrine in turn; with Lyell to-day, with Moses to-morrow; Positivist at the Royal Society, and Christian at Westminster Abbey. Such persons have a kind of double consciousness, and pass through two unreconciled lives: their scientific thought proceeds upon one path, their religious conceptions move or stay upon another: they are alternately here and there; but can give no account of the intervening space between their knowledge and their faith, and can rise to no higher point from which both are seen together. Having at different periods passed through different and quite independent developments, they end with two creeds, two orders

of taste and affection ; and whenever the time comes for border questions to arise, they cross helplessly to and fro, with the feeble intercession of good-will, but without the common language and intelligence of effective mediation. All this want of inner harmony between faith and knowledge, be it confessed or unconfessed, is the natural result of falsely dividing off the secular and the spiritual, as if they were *different things*, instead of *different thoughts about the same thing* ; and so permitting each method to run off indefinitely upon its own abstractions, till neither can find its way back, or look any whole living reality in the face. If Christian theology cannot prevent these evils, still more if it favours and promotes them, it abdicates its intellectual function of universal supervision and reconciliation of human pursuits, and descends to poor antagonisms on the very scene that should lie tranquil under its survey. Indifference and neglect towards new forms of thought and fields of research will bring a most certain retribution, fostering the growth of wild pretensions and “Arab” sciences, that follow their own rule, and remain outlaws and strangers to the realm of reverential reason. No legitimate direction of human activity, speculative or social, ought to be foreign to the sympathy of the Christian divine ; and sympathy requires knowledge and insight. His own particular stock of truths may be a very simple series ; but the range of their application, and the need of their modifying presence, are nothing less than universal ; so that he of all men wants the largest and most generous training, and scarcely completes his qualifications till he is furnished with a key to every compartment of human life and thought.

What, indeed, is true theology ? It is the *knowledge of God*. By its very definition, therefore, it must be co-extensive with the field of His manifestations, and have something to learn and report wherever His trace has been left. What more need be said to shew its encyclopedic character ? For there is no region where He does not make His sign. He is Agent and Disposer in *outward Nature* ; He communes with the inmost *individual Soul* ; He is the Providence of *collective Humanity*, and unfolds His thought in the process of history,—both the general history of the race, and the special history of the times and people to whom and through whom He has made Himself supernaturally known. And whoever is at a loss where and how to recognize Him in these several fields, is, just so far as his perplexity goes, *no theologian*.

In the *first*, we are called upon to find the religious interpretation of the *physical sciences*. To conceive aright the meaning of "Natural Laws;" to determine how they stand related to *His causality*; to reconcile the alleged action of "necessary forces" with the movement and lordship of His free thought; to adjudicate between the opposite doctrines of progressive development from low beginnings into improving forms of being, and of creation out of a perfect preconception into an imperfect realization;—these are but a few of the points at which, in the survey of nature, the roads divaricate, and we need a good *δαίμων* to keep us from divergence into godless wilds. It is a helpless thing for a divine to be unable to cope with such questions, or to present to the mind a picture of the outer world and its history which shall fall into place in the gallery of faith. Socrates describes, in one of Plato's happiest passages of dialogue, the shock his religious feeling experienced when he first read a treatise on animal mechanics and the organism of nature, and found everything explained on mere physical principles and without any reference to an Indwelling Mind. From that day to the present, the same experience has been repeated, and the relations continue uneasy between the natural sciences and religious faith. Socrates was led by it to relinquish physical pursuits, and resort to moral studies in hope of better light; and doubtless he went to the true source for apprehension of divine things. But, once in clear possession of his faith derived thence, he returned with it upon the subjects dark before, and transfigured them with its illumination. How much more should we, who have not our faith to seek in the first instance, resolve to conquer by it the difficulties and repugnances of natural science, and bid the interpreted sky of Newton, not less than the mysterious Hebrew heavens, declare the glory of God, and the morning stars sing together! The least we can ask from the divine is, that as material studies are perpetually troubling the conceptions of faith with a fatalistic shadow, he should be qualified to shew how little there is any real eclipse, and how completely the darkness is flung by phantasms of imagination. For this purpose he must gain entrance into the interior of the natural sciences, grow familiar with their logical processes, and discriminate between the mere fictions of method and the eternal fact of things.

In the *second* realm of divine manifestation,—the individual

soul,—problems still more immediately involved in all Christian teaching urge themselves upon our attention. Need I do more than pronounce the words “Holy Spirit,” to indicate the point at which our religion comes into immediate contact with psychology and morals and the whole procedure of reflective self-knowledge? If there be any one characteristic of Christian revelation more assured than all the rest, it is this faith,—that the most intimate relations subsist between the human spirit and the Divine,—that neither sits solitary in respect to the other,—that they do somehow meet upon the same field of consciousness, and in their personal life continually exercise opposing or concurrent or reciprocating action. To conceive aright of this mutual attitude is a prime necessity not only for all speculative thinkers on religious doctrine, but for the hourly experience of every meditative Christian. For a man not to know himself from his God, his Tempter from his Inspirer, is to remain blind to the first conditions of his responsible existence, and close the shutters of his moral reason. It is too late to put men off with vague phrases, once perhaps sufficient for the undeveloped consciousness of believers, but now only raising questions to leave them in the dark. After ages of fermenting doctrine, you cannot go back to the unmixed elements, but must work forward to the clear and finished product. Does not the central truth on this matter encounter perpetual contradiction at both ends? On the one hand, is not all Divine action in the soul explained away into the self-action of her own laws? And, on the other, is not the free human personality flung into the sweeping tides of Pantheistic power? And shall the Church be able to speak no mediating word? To do so with any effect, her ministers must be furnished with some coherent theory of human nature, and know what they mean when they speak of the Will, the Conscience, the Reason, the Affections;—the promptings of God’s spirit and the working of their own. Scarcely can they engage in a single act of prayer, without an *implicit* belief on this whole system of relations; and they cannot, if need be, defend the act as accordant with the highest reason, without rendering their belief *explicit*.

In the *third* field of divine manifestation,—the providential training of the human race,—we encounter the questions which more immediately concern us as believers in historical revelation. *Elsewhere*, we are engaged in settling the conditions and drawing

out the essence of *all* religion, and securing it from being lost amid the other and lower activities of our nature. *Here*, we disentangle the essence of the *Christian* religion, by comparing its characteristics, as a divine element in human affairs, with the other means by which God has left his witness in the courses of history. On this side, we obtain a correction to the excessive individualism of Protestant piety, sequestering the private mind with God, and abandoning Society and States to the secular expedencies; and are lifted to the higher view which the Catholic theology contains but the Catholic hierarchy corrupts,—that our humanity is one vast organism, at once the object and the medium of a Divine and holy purpose; that the flow of peoples, the consanguinities of language, the order of colonization, the diversities of indigenous genius, the blossoming and fall of literatures, the consolidation and dissolution of polities, are but modes and pulsations of a continuous Divine Thought, passing through time and giving it greater fulness as it goes. The more reverential spirit which this conception carries into historical studies is so far from impairing, that it incalculably enhances, our spiritual trust in the gospel of Christ. Christianity, as it has come down to us, is in any case the confluence of many currents in our humanity. You cannot detach it, as an insulated divineness, from relations with the surrounding space. It did not fall as a shooting star upon our world; it cannot hang suspended and apart in the air above us; it was a heavenly dawn for which the gliding earth had been long preparing; and it is appointed to shine more and more towards a perfect day. How, then, are we to regard the tributaries that from the first have passed into it from the life and thought of men,—the Hebrew types of conception, the Hellenic elements of speculative faith, the Roman grasp of objective conditions, the Teutonic depth of subjective experience? Are we to fling these out as foreign intrusions, and treat them as *corruptions*, simply because they are *human*? Whoever begins the process of weeding on this principle, will soon find his hand among the deepest roots, and plucking up the fairest flowers, till he scarcely knows his Eden from a fallow-field. But if God lives and acts *through* the human as well as beyond it, then may divine elements enter by that channel as well as by another; and that which flows in from the fields of history is not on that account to be dried off again as an impurity. If between Christianity as a divine revelation and the other types of human thought

and character there is not mere antagonism and mutual exclusion, but a prepared and Providential relation, as of mutual supplements in one comprehensive scheme, neither the human nor the superhuman suffers from the alliance, but both acquire a dignity auguster than before. At all events, the Church which it is given us to teach and guide as we best may, is delivered to us from the past, and has again to be delivered by us into the future, as the depository of an historical religion; and the conditions of our trust cannot be understood and fulfilled without careful study of all its antecedents, its Divine sources and its human vicissitudes. Thus only will its true ideal become clear to us; and we shall acquire the spiritual tact to separate whatever is heterogeneous or accidental, whether in the teachings of others or in hereditary formulas of our own. Historical theology pre-supposes, no doubt, the philosophical and moral, and in that sense is subject to their conditions. But, on the other hand, it constitutes the great field of their application, the text given for their interpretation, the living Kingdom of God, whose laws they proclaim and of which their vaticinations are spoken; and in this sense it is the crown and completion of them all.

If these remarks seem to sweep over too wide a field, and not to assign with sufficient minuteness the proper place to the specific parts of theological discipline, it is because I am chiefly anxious to insist on the *all-comprehensive* character of Christian education. The grand function of pure religion (if I read it right) is to preserve the *wholeness* of our living relations, and penetrate them throughout with the spirit of devout faith; to watch against the encroachment of habits and thoughts out of harmony with it; to decline a mere place as one among many knowledges and tastes, and maintain itself as a spirit among all. If there is any class of Christian teachers free to assume this panoptic position, and bound by their antecedents to aim at the hearty and complete reconciliation of philosophic thought and holy faith, assuredly it is the representatives of a body which has never imposed a creed and never feared a truth. And did we but read the signs of the times with an eye of faithful insight, I believe we should look with a moment's shame at our past negligence, and devote ourselves with life-long hope and courage to do our providential part.

